The Interspecies Newsletter

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Interspecies Protocol

The Lion's Bushman
The Bushman's Lion

There is a story told about the traditional Bushmen who used to inhabit the more remote reaches of the Kalahari desert up through the middle decades of this current century. Their oral history recounted the story of a people who lived in a semi-arid situation for at least the past thousand years. Just as their lives and their society centered around the waterholes scattered through the Kalahari, so naturally, the story of their history predominantly focused around the image and the metaphor of life around a waterhole.

The waterhole was the only reason that life could exist in the desert at all, and thus, it served as both a magnet and a community center for all the animals in the vicinity. The waterholes were, in fact, well-populated with every species of wild and ferocious beast that lives in that part of Africa including lions, hyenas, leopards, elephants, and buffalo. Though the Bushman's stories reveal ongoing instances of tribespeople being carried off into the brush, mauled, trampled, or impaled by just about every species living in their ecosystem, nowhere in their entire oral history is there even a single account of a Bushman ever being attacked by a lion. Intriguingly, neither is there a case of a Bushman ever killing a lion. This curious fact despite the ongoing and constant presence of lions at the perimeters of the Camp.

Somehow, both species had long ago developed a protocol for living at easy peace with one another.

Western anthropologists visiting these camps during the 1950's consistently make note of the fact that the glowing eyes of the lions could always be clearly discerned just beyond the reach of the cooking fire. One white observer noted that on those nights when, for whatever reason, the lions started roaring without letup, a Bushman hunter would simply saunter off to the edge of the camp to solicit the lions to please keep the noise down because, "there are children trying to sleep." The visitor was nonplussed when the lions soon heeded the request.

This same observer also noted that the Bushmen and the lions seemed to keep very strict schedules about when and when not to visit the waterhole to drink. Lions always drank late at night, Bushmen always filled their gourds during the heat of the day.

Tragically, the traditional Bushman lifestyle ended forever with the introduction of ranching into the Kalahari during the 1950's. The waterhole existence soon broke down to make way for Westernization, including such detritus of progress as the introduction of rifles, four wheel drive vehicles, and an externalized economic system based upon raising cattle for money.

Likewise, the lion's lifestyle was equally disrupted by the sudden appearance of lackadaisical cattle hanging out at the waterhole during all hours of day and night. Lions attacked the easy prey, and the ranchers and their Bushmen helpers reciprocated by shooting the lions. Ironically, within a few years time, several Bushmen had also been killed by lions.

This story is especially noteworthy because it offers us a glimpse of both a working interspecies *protocol* and its sudden breakdown in the face of Western Civilization. If we are to believe the observers, and why shouldn't we, then we can only conclude that the protocol that existed between Bushmen and lions changed in just a few years time from one of mutual trust, coexistence and interspecies community to one of estrangement, fear and mutual loathing.

Given its proper historical context, this breakdown of relations is perhaps best viewed as an archetypal event that has recurred over and over again in the largely unwritten political history of relations between humans and other animals.

Though it may not be a history that can be written down, (if for no other reason than so many of its most crucial events predate writing) it is still very much a part of our modern consciousness. It is the stuff of our dreams, our fairy tales, and especially the myths of every indigenous people on the planet.

political zoology

In medieval literature, a *protocol* was the first page glued into a manuscript cover, and which delineated the contents of the book. The word evidently originates from the Greek, protos (first) and kolla (glue). Webster defines protocol as firstly: *a record of the points on which agreement has been reached by negotiating parties preliminary to a final treaty or compact.* A second definition is: *the ceremonial forms and courtesies that are established as proper and correct in official relations between parties.*

We might define it even better by continuing to honor the word's Greek roots. In that light, regard protocol as the table of contents for the book of corrrect relations. If you're still confused, go find a copy of the *Tao Te Ching*. It offers one of the earliest as well as one of the best statements ever written about protocol .

I define *interspecies* protocol as the rules and manners that animals conform to when relating to other species. Sometimes we do best to regard protocol as a species-specific instinctual behavior, while at other times we have to recognize that certain occurances of protocol have been learned by individual animals within a species. The relationship between lion and Bushman is an example of the latter—both before and after their waterhole apocalypse.

Protocol includes things learned overnight and then never forgotten over the next thousand years. It brings to bear such concepts as reasoning, demeanor, and deportment. It implies a system of social justice between species, as well as a natural legal system based upon the establishment of communicated rules both drawn up and adhered to between species. Protocol comes into play whenever there is an implied trust needing to be communicated between species. As such, it is the foundation upon which this organization, Interspecies Communication Inc., has been built.

Interspecies protocol is the glue that attaches animals to their environment and to each other. A strong protocol is a strong glue, and a weak protocol arises from a lack of ritual behavior, as well as a lack of respectful trust between species. At no time in the long political history of humans and nature, has the interspecies protocol ever been weaker than it is today. It is one of the most important, yet least understood aspects of the entire environmental crisis we all face. I predict that it will continue to be so, at least until human beings learn to treat the other animals as peers.

As I say, strengthening the glue of protocol between humans and other species is, and always has been, the central focus of this organization. We do so by encouraging people to develop new and harmonious relations with animals. We do so by promoting those relations that already further the cause of a strong protocol. We do so through ritual, through art, and through education.

Drive down a country road in summer and watch the cattle grazing beside deer or egrets or starlings. Stop the car and walk out into field. How close did you get to any of the animals before they changed their posture. How close did you get before the birds flew away? Or harking back to the dictionary definition: if protocol were ever a science then the numbers delineating those two distances would provide a baseline of data revealing the point at which agreement between species starts to break down.

If interspecies protocol were a science we might call it bio-sociology, a field of study developed to provide

A Tibetan Celestial Lion

humanity with an accounting of the current deplorable state of relations between humans and animals.

If interspecies protocol was accorded the status of a political theory, its practitioners might be called political zoologists or even bio-politicians. Proponents of this politic might begin to provide the rest of the human race with "ceremonial forms and courtesies" to slowly lead us back into the fold of nature. Regard interspecies protocol as the etiquette of ecology. The table of contents for the law of the land.

What the raven said

One of the first things you notice in the Arctic, is that the ravens occasionally walk right up to you. They cock their long beaked faces this way and that as if trying to figure out the best way for a creature whose eyes are arranged on each side of his head (like a raven) can stare directly into the eyes of a creature whose eyes are set on a flat plane (like a human). The bird seems to solve what is, at least to my mind, an imponderable problem of eye contact, because it soon starts croaking and squawking and cooing in a genuine attempt to bridge the communication gap between species.

As soon as I start answering the raven in my own version of a respectful whisper, a strong bond is born. Over the next few days the raven is never more than fifty feet from my presence. Certainly it is asking for a free handout, and I soon oblige with cheese crackers which it snips one at time right from out of my palm. But there's far more than junk food involved in this relationship.

Human beings are creatures of hands and fingers that long to touch and feel and caress the environment. Over time, the fulfillment of this longing has developed into one of our most detrimental traits in terms of the health of the planet. That which we touch we too often destroy. Most animals know this about us, although we humans do not seem to know it at all. Ravens know it.

When I reach down and stroke the raven's head as it directs its full attention to gobbling down a cracker, the bird lets

out a wild perturbed squawk that causes me to yank my hand quickly out of reach of its intimidating scimitar-curved beak. The raven has obviously told me, 'nevermore' in the strongest possible language. Now it is looking me over this way and that as if wondering how I could be so crude as to push beyond the threshold of what is still a very fragile protocol. Human touch: the kiss of death.

Raven wings are meant to fly and now the bird takes to the air before alighting a good hundred feet away. It will take three more hours before the bird will venture close to my tent again.

Now it is three AM on a very windy "night" in a land where the sun never sets. I ordinarily keep the tent tightly sealed to keep out mosquitoes. But today the wind has kept them away far better than anything I could ever accomplish with mere zippers. I have opened the tent up a crack at the bottom to encourage better air circulation. I must fall into a dream because I am soon awakened sharply by the peck and the eye contact from my friend the raven sitting on the top of my pack. He is cooing in a plaintive tone of voice, asking me to open up the zipper to the pack because he wants 'just a few more crackers, please'.

My first feeling is of utter contentment that a wild animal, any wild animal, would honor me with such a close encounter. I reach out for the pack, open it a bit and soon disperse a few crackers. Unfortunately, when I notice a line of white goo suddenly dripping from the ravens hindquarters onto the zipper I let loose with my own human version of a raven squawk. Once again, 'nevermore'.The bird quickly backs out through the tiny hole in the tent screen.

Later, I can only wonder if there had been any special significance to the fact that the raven defecated precisely on that zipper. Maybe defecation is merely any self-respecting ravens equivalent to touching; his way of expressing the commencement of a deeper courtesy.

I spend the rest of evening watching the raven sitting on its haunches just beyond the closed-up tent screen watching closely as I write down this story. I write down questions like: "Why have I not seen another raven beside this one?"

It is very early in the morning on a night with a bright sunny sky, and my mind continues to doze off and on over the next several hours. Significantly my writer's hand never drops its pen. During that entire period, my mind continues to sit on the fence that separates waking from sleeping. Half the time I seem to be watching a raven swaying in the gusty breeze and cooing gently, ostensibly asking, 'please, my friend, why don't you let me inside the tent again.' The rest of the time I seem to be dreaming.

After breakfast the next day, I open my notebook and notice but one sentence composed during that entire period of nodding off and awakening. Here it is:

What would the raven and I have left to talk about after ten thousand years camped at this spot.

Generic Man

I live in a cozy solar house located in a flowery meadow surrounded by a mixed forest of fir, pine, willow and madrone on an island located ten miles off the mainland of North America at the northern end of Puget Sound. The forests that surround my meadow home are prime raven habitat. Just about every year, my own family finds at least one raven family building its nest somewhere on "our" property. It seems pertinent to add that the ravens who nest here are a much larger bird then the Arctic ravens I

met so often in the Arctic.

These local ravens seem to possess a richer vocabulary than the Arctic ravens, and we often hear them squawking and croaking and hissing and especially knocking like a wooden drumstick snapping up against a woodblock. On those occasions when we hear some unidentifiable animal calling in the woods, it is usually the ravens adding something new to their seemingly bottomless repertoire.

There is one other difference that distinguishes the Arctic from the local ravens. Where I live, I have never seen or even heard of a wild raven openly mingling with human beings. It seems bizarre when one considers the sheer number of local Northwest Coast Indian myths that specifically focus on human interaction with ravens. Obviously, the two species did interact once upon a time in quite an animated manner. Alas, no more. The Northwest ravens talk only among their own kind.

And if, heaven forbid, I should occasionally try to emulate the ravens vocalizing among one another, they often stop calling altogether and then beat a hasty retreat from the neighborhood. This behavior only makes me feel like the innocent victim of some local travesty that must have occured here in recent human/raven history.

In other words, they perceive me as nothing beside a **MAN**.You might call me Generic Man, the meanest-spirited creature in the entire neighborhood. And even though I view my vocalizations to be a gesture of respect and friendship, the action inevitably gets interpreted in the context of a hundred years of disintegrating protocol.

Why should they act any differently? In this last year alone, several trees containing raven nests have been felled by people with their own agendas, and those are just the nests I know about in my immediate neighborhood. In total, regard the ongoing demise of the local ravens as one more natural casualty of that euphemism we call development. But as always, government's and their citizens continue to perceive raven's *rights* in terms of nothing beside their numbers. Therefore, because the species' willful destruction by unseeing humans is not actually threatening the species, i.e. the numbers remain above the so-called threshold of protection, no one ever feels much of a need to care about a few old raven's nests.

Where I live out in the woods of the Pacific Northwest, it's probably not that much different than where you live. In other words, excuse me, but you are just as much a generic man as I am. The few remaining wild animals continue to keep to themselves. And it's only an occasional feral cat looking for a meal and warm lap that ever ventures close enough to make eye contact.

But I remain the optimist and, so, keep squawking away. A squawk here and a squawk there. Who knows to what protocol it may lead our two species over the next thousand years

Making Myth...

I suppose "making myth" means that even us generic humans are capable of reinstating a very old protocol that once upon a time defined a harmonious relationship between species.

I arrive at this conclusion as someone who, a long time ago, spent three summers occasionally jumping into the water with so-called killer whales. In those days, the species was perceived to be easily as dangerous as lions. In fact, the first time I did it in 1975, there was almost no precedent for such a crazy action. And even if there had been, the point is that, at the time, I knew of no other occurance of a human being jumping into the water with wild and healthy killer whales.

Why did I do it? Easy. The whales simply did not seem ferocious to this unpracticed eye. And even in those days, I didn't believe much of what I read in the newspapers.

Nor did I ever call them killer whales. They were always orcas to me, and that conscious choice of nomenclature helped immensely in establishing a friendly protocol between us. Ironically, I felt that if there was ever any real risk to such an encounter, it was that the whales would perceive me to be a generic man; the same old story of me getting interpreted as a mean-spirited creature possessed of a long and violent history of harming their kind. The whales might even be forced into taking defensive steps just to protect themselves. In fact, they may have once done that for a minute or two, although, mostly, their sense of trust has always been breathtaking to behold. The event I'm talking about occurred in 1978.

A photographer asked if he could shoot me playing music in the water with the whales. I agreed, and so we soon set off into the straits off Vancouver Island in search of the very friendly A pod.

We found 12 orcas milling about in a small bay that lies along the northeast side of Johnstone Strait. I slipped on my drysuit and took hold of my instrument, known as a waterphone.

The waterphone is named after its inventor, Richard Waters. It is an outer space-looking device welded together from brass prongs, a pizza pie plate, a vacuum cleaner tube and a salad bowl. But it floats like a cork and supports my weight superbly. When the prongs are rubbed back and forth with a waterproofed cello bow, the otherworldly

sound that emanates into both water and air is both loud and ethereal. The sound has been described as a heavy metal violin played through a bowl of jello. Keeping to my own convention of never chasing or barging in on the whales, I slipped into the water a few hundred yards in front of the pod, and soon started bowing the waterphone. The sound was clear. The whales could hear it.

The first whale to approach was a very large bull possessed of a very wavy dorsal fin. He advanced on me from underwater. In fact, I couldn't actually tell he was close by until I suddenly noticed his white eye patch reflecting green right in front of me four feet below the surface.

It has always taken me by surprise how huge the orcas seem to appear when viewed right at water level, with one's eyes never more than eight inches off the surface. The bull orca rose vertically to the surface; his size magnified even more so by a six foot dorsal fin looking like a skyscraper and staring me right in the face. But I never stopped playing the waterphone. The photographer started whooping and hollering, "keep playing, keep playing." He was evidently getting some good shots.

The large bull stayed there for no more than 10 seconds, then dove, only to be followed by another large male with a very straight dorsal fin. This one never came quite so close, although I could see his body passing directly underneath me. This bull was immediately followed by two females who also spouted just out of arm's reach before swimming on in the same direction.

It has been my experience, that once the whales pass, they will keep swimming until they finally disappear from view. But this time the entire pod stopped just a hundred yards from me. I continued playing. Never stopped.

Suddenly, two adolescent orcas turned about and charged me at what seemed like full speed. I saw them coming, they looked like speedboats leaving a high wake on either side of their bodies. I can't remember how long it took, but just before they should have ploughed into me, the two dove together. My heart was in my throat. I stopped playing. But the photographer was cheering and clapping. "This is incredible" he shouted, "keep playing."

Then I saw the two whales just below the tips of my own dangling feet. They were reclining vertically in the water, looking straight up at me. I looked down at them, and they looked up at me. I couldn't play. My muscles had stopped working. "Come get me," I shouted, "get me out of the water, will you!"

The photographer started his engine and quickly motored over to where I floated. He helped me into the boat, complaining all the while that the whales were still here, and that we might be able to get even better shots. I could barely breathe, laying there in the bottom of the zodiac for several seconds, shaking all over, and wondering what on Earth had I been trying to prove.

Suddenly, the bull with the wavy fin rose alongside us and rolled onto his back so that his pure white belly shone along the entire length of the boat. My mouth fell open as I leaned over the boat and watched him lying there.

In retrospect, I realize that what we viewed as a gesture of vulnerability could just as easily be interpreted in any of several different ways. But given the actual context of that particular moment, I immediately read his gesture as a very clear sign of friendship. And apology. The whale was insisting to me that there was no danger present here; and furthermore, if I felt so inclined, I should consider getting back into the water again. Then he disappeared.

I rested another five minutes before getting back into the water again. The whales were still milling about. I began stroking the prongs of the waterphone with my hand, and then finally began playing it with the cello bow. The whales moved a bit closer, until their bodies rested on the surface just about 30 yards from my own. I knew from testing the waterphone earlier, that the orcas would be able to hear the music quite clearly at that distance. Whatever it was that they heard or didn't hear or felt or didn't feel; They listened for no more than five minutes before moving off down the strait again. I soon came back into the boat. End of session.

....Is Making Change

The Animal Rights Movement tends to elaborate a politics of protecting animals as individuals. It is individual animals that suffer; it is the individual animals who desperately need our society to revise its attitudes towards diet, law, and compassion. Notably, its most articulate spokespeople are teachers, veterinarians, psychologists, and lawyers. These are people whose ideals are largely social, and thus, their work is often couched in the terms of social justice.

The concept of animals as food may be foremost among the issues set forth by the Animal Rights Movement, and a conversion of our society towards vegetarianism has always been one of the movement's cornerstones. What we put into our mouths is killing them.

In terms of protocol between species, here's the unspoken lesson we learn from the Animal Rights Movement: Whether or not we make the leap to embrace 100% vegetarianism, developing a ***conscious*** relationship to our food offers individual humans an essential initiation into the mindspace known as interspecies protocol.

On the other hand, the Environmental Movement tends to perceive of the animals in terms of species who inhabit ecosystems. It is the species that need protection, it is the species who desperately need our society to revise its attitudes towards law, resources, and population growth. Notably, its most articulate spokespeople

are biologists, lawyers, teachers, and the hybrid trade known as an *environmentalist*. These are people whose ideals are largely focused in ecology, and thus, their work is often couched in terms of natural balance and sustainability. The issue of animal sustainability is critical, and the protection of habitat from human destruction is one of the cornerstones of the Environmental Movement. Where we go and what we do once we get there is key.

In terms of protocol between species, here's the greatest lesson we learn from the Environmental Movement. Whether we make the choice to protect our own backyard, or instead devote all our time to issues far away but still essential to planetary health, developing a **conscious** relationship to the impact of our own footsteps offers an essential initiation into the mindspace known as interspecies protocol.

And though too many people expend too much energy trying to deny it, the Animal Rights Movement and the Environmental Movement are two sides to the same coin. One side has a picture of a mouth, the other side has a picture of a foot. Both sides offer some strong medicine to cure our foot and mouth disease.

When you flip the coin, you inevitably start playing the game called **interspecies protocol**. Consider this brief essay a first attempt to establish some basic rules to that game.

—Jim Nollman

Book Reviews

Bird Flight

An Illustrated Study of Aerial Mastery, by Robert Burton (facts on File)

The Restless Kingdom

An exploration of Animal Movement, by John Cooke, (Facts on File)

Every so often, we receive a coffeetable size book in the mail from a publisher named, oddly enough, Facts on File. Two of their more recent offerings are exquisite examples of the fine art of jumbo-sized nature books, and definitely deserve some promotion. The first thing you notice about *Bird Flight*, by Robert Burton ($24.95), is the deft choice of seemingly impossible photographs of birds landing and taking off and soaring and flapping and gliding. While the photos come from many sources, the text is all Burton's. He translates what may sometimes seem the utter mystery of flight into a concise language reminiscent of aeronautical engineering. Yet the way he weds the awesome mechanics of flight with such zoological issues as preening, predator evasion, and feeding behavior makes for a great read. The picture of a barn owl preening its feathers has to be one of the great bird pictures of the world.

The Restless Kingdom, by John Cooke, utilizes the same basic format of quite unbelievable photos drawn from many sources all brought together under the banner of animal mechanics. Unfortunately, at $49.95 it probably won't be seen very many places besides libraries. This book offers its readers a more general exploration of animal movement than the above one. Cooke's writing is often poetic and yet he still offers a concise explanation of how and why animals evolved to move as they do. If this book stands out, it is primarily because there are so many sharp photographs of creatures you never thought existed until you see them here. I was especially taken by his description of an entire class of tiny insects that developed to live and move entirely along the surface film of fresh water. The trick is getting your body to produce 'surfacants', chemicals that markedly reduce surface tension. When surfacants are released by the backside, the water rushes in, which in turn propels the animal forward.

In conclusion, consider *Bird Flight* a zoologist's text beautiful enough to be displayed anywhere, while *The Restless Kingdom* is the epitome of a high quality coffeetable book definitive enough to draw the serious attention of zoologists.

Treasury of Fantastic and Mythological Creatures

Richard Huber, (Dover Publications)

Speaking of large formatted books, a few readers have asked me where I get all the crazy line drawings that so often pop up in this newsletter. Actually, my very favorite source is Richard Huber's *Treasury of Fantastic and Mythological Creatures* (Dover), which has page after page of bizarro drawings taken from sources as varied as Picasso, ancient Egypt, and the Sepik highlands of New Guinea. I fell in love with this book, not only because its selections represent the outer reaches of human imagination, but because the drawings are newsletter size and can be easily handscanned into a desktop publishing program.

Parallel Botany

Leo Lionni, (Alfred A. Knopf), 1977

Lionni is best known for his cut-paper illustrated children's books (my own kids love the story of Swimmy, the

IC News

As anyone who has ever worked in the non-profit world knows, the success of corporate projects depends largely on an organization's ability to interest sponsors to the cause. In that light, let it be known that IC has suddenly become involved in some of the largest and most intriguing projects of its 13 year existence. And we need your help. These projects include:

- Our beluga film project has recently developed into a co-production with the ARC group of Chicago, a company with much experience in environmental film making. Hopefully, if funding comes through as planned, at least four of us will be going to meet 2000 beluga whales up in the Canadian Arctic at the end of July. We'll carry a full report in the next newsletter.

- A scouting down to a coastal temperate rainforest in Chile during next January. Evidently, the original Indians in this area developed a sacred relationship with the dolphins in one of the fiords there. The Indians are extinct, but the dolphins are still present and friendly. Our project will focus on reestablishing a lost protocol between humans and dolphins.

- Establishing a permanent orca monitoring station on San Juan Island Washington. This project seems to be developing as a collaboration between longtime orca researcher Rich Osborne, and Tom Rebold who wrote the lead story about analysing orca sounds in our last newsletter.

- We are in dire need of a new computer system. We wish for a 486 with a 100 mbyte hard drive, a super VGA monitor and card, and a flatbed scanner. In other words, we need about $5000. Any donations, or viable leads will be dearly appreciated. Please.

fish who organized his school to fit together to form a giant fish). *Parallel Botany* delineates in the greatest possible detail, an obscure class of plants. In fact, the book is a peerless parody of a dull biological treatise; a dry text about nonexistent plant characteristics, with much added information about nonexistent habitats, nonexistent tribal people who used the plants for various nonexistent medicinal purposes, and finally, the nonexistent Western Botanists who brought the nonexistent plants back to nonexistent civilization. This book is an eccentric masterpiece, although, most unfortunately, it may also be out of print. Sometimes I wonder if I own the only copy that was ever printed, and yet I can only find mine on the first day of every other month. An example merely wets the appetite for more:

...Kamikochi decided to take a closer look at the flowers and so started walking toward the hilltop. On the way he realized that something very bizarre was taking place. Unlike what usually happens when we approach an object we have seen from a distance - it gradually appears larger until, when we are near enough to touch it, it assumes its proper dimensions - these plants did not seem to get bigger as the biologist approached them. When Kamikochi reached the hilltop they turned to be just as small as they had appeared from a hundred meters away.

Raven in Winter

Bernd Heinrich, (Summit Books)

And lastly, *Ravens in Winter*, by Bern Heinrich is a good source book for anyone interested in learning more about ravens; and especially about how one field biologist went about studying one group of ravens over several year's time. Heinrich first became interested in ravens one winter when he noticed them sharing their food and then setting forth in the very atypical behavior of summoning other ravens to join the feast. Over the next four years he sat out in the Maine snow and learned to identify the meaning of several of their calls as well as various postures and their often playful social behavior. If you have ravens near your house, read this book. But don't let it be your only source; go get a book of Haida or Kwakiutl myths to round out your interest. Otherwise, you will learn a lot about ravens and almost nothing about the protocol of coexisting with ravens.

Although *Ravens in Winter* possesses the aura of a book that will win all the nature-writing prizes, it still lacks something essential. Heinrich expends far too many pages describing the cold rigor of his research which I'm sure must be very appealing to young biologists searching for methodological tips from a mentor. He is obviously happiest convincing his own peers about some strange raven behavior, or figuring out an apt way to display the hard data of his research.

He thus emerges a bit too much as the doubting zoologist involved in the "knotty problems" of discovering a rationale to describe the behavior of dumb animals who somehow still seem to act smart. When Heinrich tells us that the ravens appear wise, (as they so often appear in American Indian mythology), it is always within the context of being a species within the small-brained bird class. Thus, ultimately, wisdom gets categorized as a characteristic of human beings, although other species, including ravens, sometimes appear to be emulating it.

Let me repeat. Don't forget. If you read this book, also read the myths. Here's an excerpt:

...it dives and rolls like a black thunderboltout of the sky or speeds along with liquid, gliding strokes. The raven is the paragon of the air, and more. It is assumed to be the brains of the bird world, so its deep, sonorous pentrating voice demands immediate attention and respect, even though we have little or no idea what it says. It has a greater variety of calls than perhaps any other animal in the world except human beings.